

VZCZCXYZ1903  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUB #0213/01 0632232  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 032232Z MAR 08  
FM USINT HAVANA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2965  
INFO RUEHWL/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS IMMEDIATE  
RUCOGCA/NAVSTA GUANTANAMO BAY CU IMMEDIATE  
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFIAA/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFIAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2966

C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000213

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2017  
TAGS: CU PGOV PHUM PINR PREL  
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN CUBA: SAME REPRESSION WITH  
DIFFERENT TACTICS

REF: A. REFTEL A: HAVANA 207  
1B. REFTEL B: HAVANA 84  
1C. REFTEL C: HAVANA 159  
1D. REFTEL D: HAVANA 181  
1E. REFTEL E: 07 HAVANA 1190  
1F. REFTEL F: HAVANA 168

Classified By: COM: M.E. Parmly : For reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) Summary: Since Raul Castro assumed control of the Cuban government in July 2006, but especially since his July 26, 2007 speech, there has been a change in regime tactics for suppressing dissent. Focusing on the limited release of some political prisoners and the willingness to air different opinions in certain controlled fora, some in the media and in the international community see a reduction in the level of repression in Cuba. In fact, the regime acts to quash dissent as swiftly as ever. It is apparent that the government is trying to avoid adding to the number of political prisoners. However, the government effectively and forcibly acts to break up demonstrations relying on short term detentions rather than lengthy prison sentences. The GOC has moved from organizing large mobs to intimidate pro-democracy activists to making more subtle threats privately. According to USINT contacts, repression remains more open and aggressive in areas outside of Havana, far from the scrutiny of foreign embassies and the international press. Repression of youth normally escapes notice because the government targets anyone who is considered a potential threat, and not only those politically involved. The end result is that the GOC still denies its citizens freedom of expression and freedom of assembly without attracting a lot of negative publicity. End summary.

12. (C) The actions of Cuban police and security forces on March 1 to stop a group of pro-democracy from passing out copies of the UN Declaration of Human Rights (reftel a) typifies the new pattern of the Cuban government in dealing with public protests. Plain clothes members of the security surround the group, sometimes beating the participants. Uniformed police stand by and do nothing to prevent violence from the security personnel, posing as angry members of the public. The demonstrators are then dragged into cars and either driven directly home or held in detention until

transportation to their home provinces can be arranged. Invariably to date all participants are released from custody and no charges are filed. It is striking that Cuba's most vocal opposition figure, Jorge Luis Garcia Perez ("Antunez"), has been beaten by police and detained nearly every week since his release from prison in 2007, without any formal charges yet being filed.

¶3. (C) Cuban state security still keeps opposition groups under close surveillance as demonstrated by the fact that they are often able to stop every person intending to travel to a demonstration, even when people are traveling from many different locations. Police stop some people at their homes, or grab others as soon as they get off a train or bus. Those detained are then held for as long as it takes to ensure that they are unable to get to the protest. For example, the police detained over a hundred people who were trying to participate in actions to commemorate Human Rights Day on December 10. In every case those detained were eventually released without charges.

¶4. (C) In January of 2008 the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) released its end of year report on political prisoners in Cuba. The report lists 234 political prisoners, a drop from 246 named in the July 2007 report, and from the 316 political prisoners held in July of 2006 when Fidel Castro temporarily ceded power to his brother Raul (reftel b). Understandably much of the criticism of Cuba's human rights record is focused on the political prisoners. As a result, the GOC now seems to see these prisoners as bargaining chips to curry favors, especially from European governments. The strategy seeks to avoid new arrests, and to let the numbers dwindle due to a combination of cases where the prisoner served his entire

sentence and small targeted releases credited to the intervention of an important foreign visitor. An example of the latter is the recent release to Spain of four of the group of 75 jailed in the massive crackdown in 2003 (reftel c). In this case Spain can say its policy of engagement is working and Cuba gets favorable publicity while the prisoners go into exile and cannot pose problems for the regime.

¶5. (C) Before Raul took command, it was common for angry mobs, sometimes of hundreds of people, to surround dissidents and shout threats and M= v/pe-ays and the guards plucked hairs out of his head. He further described how on February 23 a mob surrounded for several hours the house of his organization's president, Roberto Marero, hurling insults. In Havana now it is unusual for protesters to be held for more than a couple of hours.

¶7. (C) International organizations and the international press have rarely commented on the escalating repression of Cuban youth (reftel f). The police routinely profile, harass, detain and forcibly transport out of Havana youths due to dress, race, sexual preference and attitude. Several human rights organizations think that arrests for "dangerousness", an offense that requires no proof of a crime, have gone up in the last year. "Dangerousness" carries penalties from fines to four years imprisonment. The vast majority of those convicted are not politically involved, but are young adults who in some way have offended the local police.

¶8. (C) Comment: It is clear that repression in Cuba has not lessened, but the tactics are changing. Cubans are still systematically denied of the right of free expression and of any right of association. This may be indicative of Raul's more pragmatic, results-oriented approach. Raul does not seem to possess Fidel's tendency to vindictively punish his opponents. Rather, Raul's goal seems to be to silence opponents with the minimum of bad publicity and focus on his overall goal of maintaining full control.